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**A Qualitative Evaluation of Reasons
for Enlisting in the Military:
Interviews with New Active - Duty
Recruits**

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A QUALITATIVE EVALUATION OF REASONS FOR ENLISTING IN THE MILITARY:
INTERVIEWS WITH NEW ACTIVE-DUTY RECRUITS¹

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13. ABSTRACT (Maximum 200 words) Past enlistment decision research indicates that individuals join the military for a variety of economic and psychological reasons. By evaluating interview data collected from new recruits, the present study sought to understand the enlistment decision process through grouping recruits according to their enlistment reasons. The data in this report were collected as a part of an in-depth interview effort by the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC). New recruits were interviewed at selected U.S. military entrance processing stations in six locations. Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO) Initially analyzed the data and provided a structured presentation of the findings. The present paper discusses a second analytic effort that sought to supplement the HumRRO analysis. Eight frequently mentioned motivations underlying the recruits' enlistment decision were identified: Historical Interest, Self Improvement, Job/Skill Training, Money for Education, Floundering, Time Out, Get Away/Escape, and No Other Jobs/ Prospects. Other influential factors included the desire for job security, benefits, travel, challenge, meeting new people, and serving the country. Additionally, experiences with recruiters appeared to play a role in the decision-making process. Finally, the level of personal independence and "goal orientedness" of each individual helped to shape his or her reasons for joining the military.					
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Rationale:

To attract high-quality applicants, the U.S. Armed Forces allocate major funding for general recruiting efforts and economic incentives, such as enlistment bonuses. Successful implementation and evaluation of recruiting and incentive programs hinges on understanding the important psychological and economic factors that underlie enlistment motivation patterns. Enlistment decision research, therefore, has been ongoing for many years within the Military Services.

Overall, research on the enlistment decision indicates that people join the military for a variety of economic and psychological reasons, and that these reasons may fall into general categories. In evaluating the enlistment decision process, however, it is also important to supplement the existing survey data with qualitative information gained from less structured approaches such as focus groups or interviews. Thus, with the present interview study, an attempt was made to gain insight into the enlistment decision process by evaluating interview data collected from new recruits. Specifically, this study sought to identify and group recruits according to their enlistment reasons.

Procedure:

The data presented in this report were collected as part of an in-depth interview effort conducted by the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC). New recruits were interviewed at selected U.S. military entrance processing stations in six locations across the country during the months of February through June, 1991. The recruits were asked a variety of questions regarding experiences leading to their enlistment decision. Interviewers allowed the recruits to give lengthy, unstructured responses.

The Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO) initially analyzed the data and provided a very structured presentation of the findings. A second team of reviewers analyzed a sample of the original interviews in order to provide a more in-depth assessment of the data emphasizing common underlying themes among the recruits' decisions. The present paper discusses the second analytic effort.

Executive Summary

Findings:

The analysis of these interview data revealed eight frequently mentioned motivations underlying recruit enlistment decisions. These motivations were *Historical Interest*, *Self-Improvement*, *Job/Skill Training*, *Money for Education*, *Floundering*, *Time Out*, *Get Away/Escape*, and *No Other Jobs/Prospects*. With few exceptions, the interviewed recruits communicated at least one of the eight categories as reasons for enlisting. However, many of those interviewed expressed a complex combination of a few of the reasons, such that no two enlistees were exactly alike. These enlistment motivation categories are quite similar to those identified in previous survey research, indicating the pervasiveness and the robust nature of these motivations.

Other influential factors included the desire for job security and insurance benefits, and the opportunity to travel, to meet new people, to be challenged, and to serve the country. Additionally, the experience with the recruiter, whether positive or negative, appeared to play a major role in the subsequent decision-making process of many of these recruits. Finally, the personality of he or she seemed to play a crucial role in how he or she approached the decision process. The raters' consensus was that the interviews appeared to fall along a continuum of "dependent" versus "independent." The more dependent recruits were more likely to be influenced by other people, including their recruiters. On the other hand, the more independent recruits expressed personal conviction and pride in having made their own decisions. Another underlying personality continuum involved the extent to which recruits were "goal-oriented" or "exploring" in nature. Goal-oriented individuals generally viewed military service as a means to an end, whereas exploring individuals saw their service as a way to escape temporarily or to get away permanently from a stagnant situation.

Utilization of Findings:

The information presented in this report may have implications for recruiting programs, advertising strategies, and recruiter sales presentations. Additionally, suggestions are provided for the use of this report by military personnel and researchers interested in retention and support services. Finally, these interview data can also be used to supplement the growing quantitative data base on the enlistment decision. It is suggested that these identified composites underlying the enlistment process are important enough to warrant further research.

A QUALITATIVE EVALUATION OF REASONS FOR ENLISTING IN THE MILITARY: INTERVIEWS WITH NEW ACTIVE-DUTY RECRUITS

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A QUALITATIVE EVALUATION OF REASONS FOR ENLISTING IN THE MILITARY: INTERVIEWS WITH NEW ACTIVE-DUTY RECRUITS

INTRODUCTION

To attract high-quality applicants, the U.S. Armed Forces place great emphasis on their recruiting efforts. Successful implementation and evaluation of such recruiting efforts as well as incentive programs hinges on understanding the important psychological and economic factors that underlie enlistment motivation patterns. Enlistment decision research, therefore, has been ongoing for many years within the Military Services.

Research Addressing Why Individuals Enlist in the Military

In order to locate publications dealing explicitly with new recruits or potential recruits and why they enlist, a complete literature search was conducted using both computer and manual methods. In addition, one of the investigators contacted research representatives from each of the Services to inquire about current enlistment decision research efforts and/or publications. Comparatively few publications were devoted *specifically* to studying why individuals enlist. Several articles were found, however, that addressed the following: a) issues of enlistment propensity, b) the effects of advertising on enlistment behavior, or c) utilizing statistical procedures to model enlistment intentions. Of all four Services, only the Army (as represented by the Army Research Institute and U.S. Army Recruiting Command) reported having done research specific to enlistment motivations with new recruits. However, the Navy reported that its researchers are in the process of planning a study of new recruits. The remaining surveys and articles on reasons for enlistment were found at the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC). In the paragraphs that follow, a summary of this research is presented.

Examples of the most current survey instruments for measuring enlistment intentions include the Youth Attitude Tracking Study (YATS) and the Survey of Recruit Socioeconomic Backgrounds (SRSB) conducted by DMDC, the New Recruit Survey conducted by the U.S. Army Recruiting Command (USAREC), and the Survey of High School Seniors conducted by the Army Research Institute (ARI). Such surveys are used to identify potential recruiting strengths and weaknesses, assess the impact of advertising and marketing programs, explore the impact of current events, and allocate resources both geographically and among the Services. Typically, analyses of such surveys focus on respondents' endorsements of enlistment reasons. The most commonly endorsed or most highly ranked reasons for joining are considered to be the important ones.

The Youth Attitude Tracking Study (YATS) focuses on American youth between 16 and 24 years of age. Each Fall, the survey is administered to approximately 10,000 respondents, stratified by gender and weighted to the national population. YATS respondents are asked to give as many reasons as they can for joining the military, and the interviewer tabulates these

according to pre-established categories. The first reason, where there are multiple reasons mentioned, is often considered the most important. Analyses of YATS data have revealed several primary reasons for enlisting, such as skill training, money for college, improving self-esteem and discipline, and duty to the country (Lougee, 1993).

The Survey of Recruit Socioeconomic Backgrounds (SRSB) is designed for new recruits in all Services. In order to determine the socioeconomic status of military recruits, the respondents are asked various questions about themselves and their parents. In addition, recruits are given a list of reasons for joining the military and are asked to pick as many reasons as apply to them, indicating which one is most important. Reasons given by new recruits have been quite similar to the YATS data results with self improvement, money for college, skill training, and service to the country topping the list (Lougee, 1993).

In the 1980s, the Army Research Institute (ARI) developed the New Recruit Surveys to answer questions concerning the demographics and enlistment motivations of new Army recruits (Elig, Johnson, Gade, & Hertzbach, 1984). In addition, ARI conducted the Survey of High School Seniors which was designed to identify the motives, incentives, and key influences in the enlistment decision process (Elig et al., 1984). The New Recruit Surveys continue to be administered annually under the direction of the U.S. Army Recruiting Command (USAREC). Consistently, results of the New Recruit Surveys have indicated that the most important reasons for joining are: "money for college," "skill training," "service to country," and "prove I can make it" (Baker, 1990; Elig, et al., 1984; Gade & Elig, 1986; Pliske, Elig, & Johnson, 1986; Sollner, 1994). A comparative study of the New Recruit Surveys and the Survey of High School Seniors found that the two revealed nearly identical enlistment reasons (Gade & Elig, 1986).

Theoretical Conceptualizations of Enlistment Motivations

In an effort to describe and conceptualize what motivates individuals to enlist, military researchers have taken many approaches. Economists have refined various modeling efforts that are used to predict how different economic factors (e.g., pay, benefits, bonuses, and unemployment rates) affect enlistments (e.g., Brown, 1985). Psychologists, sociologists, and general military personnel researchers have compiled volumes of survey data from sources such as YATS, SES, and the New Recruit Surveys. Researchers have also attempted to describe enlistment decision "categories." For example, Moskos (1982b) distinguished between two major categories of potential enlistees in today's All-Volunteer Force. One category included citizen soldiers who consider a tour of military duty to be a temporary position in their lives and a stopping place on the way to their eventual civilian roles. The second category involved career soldiers who seriously contemplate serving in the military as a career.

Enlistment decision categorization has also been attempted with factor analytic techniques. For instance, data from the Army's 1983 Survey of High School Seniors were factor analyzed using a principal components solution to determine reasons for enlistment. Four components were found. The first, self-improvement, was characterized by reasons such as "a chance to better myself," "to prove I can make it," "earn respect from others," and "getting time to figure out what

I really want to do." The second component, education, included "getting money for college," "vocational-technical or business training," and "getting trained in a skill that will help get a civilian job." Third was escaping from civilian life, which encompassed "being unemployed," "being away from home," and "escaping personal problems." Finally, patriotism, the fourth component, included "to serve my country," and "being a soldier" (Gade & Elig, 1986). Several separate principal component analyses have been run on the 1982 and 1983 New Recruit Survey data, all yielding similar results. For instance, Pliske, Elig, & Johnson (1986) found six distinct factors underlying recruits' enlistment motivations: self-improvement, economic advancement, military service, time out, travel, and education money. In addition, Gade & Elig (1986) found four broad factors: self-improvement, education, economics, and escaping from civilian life.

Overall, research on the enlistment decision indicates that people join the military for a variety of economic and psychological reasons, and that these reasons may fall into general categories. In evaluating the enlistment decision process, however, it is also important to supplement the existing survey data with qualitative information gained from less structured approaches such as focus groups or interviews. Such techniques can yield rich sources of data, capable of offering further insight into the psychological decision processes. Interview techniques can be used to reveal not only the stated reasons for enlisting, but also the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that lead up to that decision. Furthermore, by complementing traditional survey data, interview data may provide leads for further research.

With the present interview study, an attempt was made to gain insight into the enlistment decision process by allowing new recruits to speak about their experiences leading to enlistment in a natural and unstructured way. The purpose of this paper was to provide a qualitative summary of the data while at the same time emphasizing any possible underlying enlistment motivations among the recruits. Unlike the survey format, this interview format allowed new recruits to disclose their reasons for joining by simply discussing them rather than by ranking them with a paper-and-pencil instrument. Thus, in evaluating such data, it became necessary to look for overlap or commonalities among the subjects, rather than just creating a tally. (Those interested in the full and detailed analysis of these data should see the summary report of the data by Lerro, Tagliareni, Batley, & Sellman, 1991.)

Following the ideas of Moskos (1982b) and other military researchers who were able to define enlistment decisions through categories (e.g., Gade & Elig, 1986; Pliske et al., 1986; Baker, 1990), this study attempted to elucidate some potential "enlistment types." Of primary interest was whether enlistment profiles (such as those identified by previous survey researchers) would be evident in an analysis of interview data. If, in fact, certain enlistment motivations were common among new military recruits, they should surface frequently in open discussions with them. This paper presents the overlapping reasons for enlistment that were noted among the interviewed recruits. Upon concluding, the implications of the findings for both military recruiting and retention efforts, and for future enlistment decision research are presented.

METHOD

Background

The current study was designed to augment the findings of a previous research project conducted by the Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO) and Westat, Inc., under contract with the Defense Manpower Data Center. The goal of the original study was to increase the military's understanding of why youth enlist in the different Services. To achieve this aim, the study had several components. First, HumRRO and Westat constructed a model of enlistment motivation based upon a literature review of the research on vocational choice. Second, they conducted focus group interviews with recruiters from the active and Reserve components of the military, and with Service marketing and advertising personnel. Third, they conducted in-depth interviews with 200 active and Reserve enlistees from the four Services (Batley, Lerro, Schroyer, Tagliareni, Greenlees, & Griffith, 1991; Lerro, Tagliareni, Batley, & Sellman, 1991; Lerro et al., 1992).

From the original study, two reports were prepared by HumRRO: a) "Volume 1. Summary of Enlistment Findings: The Enlistment Decision Process," (Lerro et al., 1991) and b) "Volume 2. Case Studies: The Enlistment Decision Process" (Lerro et al., 1992). These reports divided the principal reasons youth decide to enlist in the military into three broad categories: economic (e.g., financial gain, money for education), personal (e.g., develop self discipline or confidence), and environmental (e.g., family situation, no future in current situation). For a more detailed discussion of the original study, refer to Lerro et al. (1992).

The purpose of the current paper was to reexamine one aspect of the original HumRRO/Westat study: the enlistment decision interviews conducted with the active-duty recruits. With this investigation, an attempt was made to examine the interviews from a different perspective.

The current paper can be distinguished from the HummRRO/Westat work in two respects. First, the original effort had a broader focus. In addition to conducting interviews with recruits, HumRRO/Westat conducted focus group interviews with various military personnel. In contrast, the current study had a limited focus, with the exclusive concern being the interviews conducted with active duty recruits. Second, the original study and the present study utilized the information gathered from the recruit interviews in different ways. The information gathered from the recruit interviews in the HumRRO/Westat study was ultimately used to identify enlistment motivations under three general categories (economic, personal, and environmental). In contrast, the current paper analyzed the interview data in an attempt to identify and group recruits according to specific enlistment types. The information regarding enlistment types was then used to develop composites of enlistment motivations that could represent different reasons for enlisting in the military. In short, the current study attempted to expand on the general enlistment categories presented by HumRRO, and thus, clarify the reasons for enlistment.

Interviews

The recruit interviews were conducted between February and June of 1991 at Military Entrance Processing Stations (MEPS) in six major U.S. cities: Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Oakland, California; St. Louis, Missouri; Montgomery, Alabama; San Antonio, Texas; and Boston, Massachusetts. Each semi-structured interview took approximately 1 to 2 hours to complete. The development of topics for the interview protocol was guided by the model of enlistment motivation proposed by HumRRO and Westat. Recruits were asked open-ended questions and were encouraged to talk about their family backgrounds, living environments, friendships, schools, and other experiences that might have contributed to the decision to enlist in the military (see the interview protocol in the appendix). The sequence of items discussed was designed to move the interview from less threatening, common, everyday questions (e.g., "What are some of your hobbies?") to more complex, emotionally-laden issues (e.g., "How do others feel about your decision to enlist?"). Nevertheless, the nature of the interviews remained non-threatening and non-judgmental. The interviewers had advanced degrees in the behavioral sciences and worked in military research.

Although these interviews were conducted during the Persian Gulf War, the interviewers did not attempt to directly elicit information from the enlistees regarding the war's significance in their decision to enlist. While the enlistees were likely affected by this national crisis, conclusions regarding the role of the Persian Gulf War on the enlistment decision of these recruits would be premature.

Subjects

The current study re-examined the interviews conducted by HumRRO and Westat among the active-duty enlistees. Thus, of the original 200 interviews conducted by HumRRO and Westat, only the 104 interviews with active-duty enlistees were reviewed. These enlistees were located at the Military Entrance Processing Stations (MEPS) in five of the six cities: Pittsburgh, Oakland, St. Louis, Montgomery, and San Antonio. (The interviews conducted in Boston were not reviewed for this paper because they included Reserve Component recruits only.)

Each Service of the Armed Forces was represented in this study. Of the 104 recruits interviewed, 35 percent (36) were enlisting in the Navy, 28 percent (29) were enlisting in the Army, 20 percent (21) were enlisting in the Air Force, and 17 percent (18) were enlisting in the Marine Corps. The recruits interviewed in this study were predominately male (83 percent). The racial composition of the recruits interviewed was: Seventy one percent White, 13 percent Black, 13 percent Hispanic, and 3 percent Asian. One recruit was of mixed heritage. Most recruits were 19 to 20 years of age. However, the age range varied considerably, as did the lifestyles and types of responsibilities assumed by the recruits. Recruits were primarily from middle income families, followed by low income, and high income families. About half (47 percent) of the recruits had high school diplomas, and approximately another third (30 percent) had earned some college

credit. A small percentage (7 percent) had obtained college degrees. The remaining recruits (16 percent) were either attending high school or had alternative credentials.

Procedures

Preliminary Review. Preliminary reviews of the interviews were conducted by two investigators to determine the prevalence of common motivations among the enlistment decisions of active-duty recruits. Each investigator arbitrarily selected and reviewed a separate set of 20 interviews, and noted the most frequently cited reasons for enlisting. Once the preliminary reviews were complete, each investigator independently constructed a list of enlistment decision reasons that were predominant across the interviews he or she reviewed. Strikingly, there was strong agreement between the two lists. After review and discussion of the two lists, a single list of eight enlistment decision categories, considered central to the enlistment decisions of recruits, was developed. These categories were: *Historical Interest*, *Self-Improvement*, *Job/Skill Training*, *Money for Education*, *Floundering*, *Time Out*, *Get Away/Escape*, and *No Other Jobs/Prospects*.

Interview Classification. The second part of the analysis involved the review of all 104 active-duty interviews. Three raters, blind to any existing research on enlistment decisions, separately reviewed the interviews and categorized each into one or more of the enlistment types that best represented the recruits' reasons for enlisting. Utilizing the categories developed in the preliminary review to describe what motivated recruits to join the military, reviewers were instructed to select as many of these reasons as they believed to be influential in the recruits' decisions and tally a list of these for each of the 104 interviews. While most enlistees' decisions employed a combination of the reasons, nearly all of them could be classified within at least one.

Development of Composites. The next step in the analysis involved development of a composite to explain or describe each of the eight categories. The first step in the creation of the composites was a compilation of a number of interviews to be reexamined. One of the three raters reviewed the notes that all three raters had made in their original readings of the interviews. Based on these notes, a list of interview numbers to be reexamined was formulated. The interviews which were included represented those in which the interviewees' decisions to enlist was noted to be strongly influenced by one of the eight enlistment factors. For example, if at least one of the three independent raters had marked *Self-Improvement* as a primary reason for enlistment for interview number 6 from San Antonio, it was included in the list. The final list encompassed 61 percent of the interviews originally read (63 of 104). The remaining 39 percent of the interviews comprised those in which no one primary reason for enlistment was distinguishable. A large majority (87 percent) of these 63 interviews were noted by at least two of the three raters in their original readings as having enlistees who employed one particular factor in their enlistment decision. The final result of this process was the compilation of a list of those interviews in which the recruits seemed to demonstrate most clearly the dominant characteristics of one of the eight specific enlistment types.

One of the original raters then went back to reread the selected 63 interviews, writing down any statements the enlistees or interviewers made which demonstrated the importance of the primary factor in each recruit's enlistment decision. A composite was then drawn up for each of the eight categories based upon an analysis of the compilation of statements. The composites were developed from a generalization of similarities among those recruits who utilized the same primary reason in making their decision to enlist. These composites also contained some direct quotes from both the interviewers and interviewees. After having read each of those interviews twice and comparing the important statements from each, it was relatively easy to draw eight generalized composites to characterize what are referred to as "enlistment types."

RESULTS

The following paragraphs describe the eight enlistment types identified in this research by presenting a composite summary of each. As noted, each composite reflects characteristics from a number of individuals. These are designed to provide a sense of the different types of enlistees who were interviewed and the determinant factors in their decisions to enlist. In addition, other themes which emerged during analyses are discussed.

Summary of Composites

Historical Interest. While not frequently mentioned as the main cause for enlistment, this first category represented an important underlying motivator for many new recruits in their decision to enlist. Many interviewees acknowledged an early interest in the military based upon family history or influential media images. It was surprising to note how many enlistees had several family members involved in the military; military service seemed to "run in the family." Equally surprising was the number of enlistees who knew by age five that they wanted to fly a military aircraft. The early military inclination was then cultivated through contact with enlisted family members, continued exposure to media images, or participation in Junior ROTC courses in high school. While some individuals in this category felt they *should* join the military in the interest of family tradition, others really *wanted* to join based on their long-term desire.

Self-Improvement. The individuals in this category were enlisting in order to gain certain attributes they felt would improve their character or increase their sense of self-worth, such as maturity, pride, self-discipline, self-confidence, self-satisfaction, and self-reliance. Their frequent usage of words beginning with "self" demonstrated that these individuals may have had problems with their self-image and hoped that the discipline of military life would help them to "grow up" and "get a new life" with a more positive attitude about themselves. One woman summarized this desire when stating that the Service should "help her discover what it is she wants to do; give her a lead or direction and a sense of responsibility." In general, these individuals desired improvement of what they believed were underdeveloped coping capabilities.

Job/Skill Training. This third category represented a group of people who desired self-improvement in a different sense than those mentioned above. Whether they had a particular job (e.g., policeman or pilot) or a general field (e.g., electronics or mechanics) in mind, all of them wanted training to become more marketable, and thus, ensured of civilian or military employment in the future. One young man stated that he enlisted to avoid working in an unskilled position at a Burger King because he knew that "the military gives you good experience and a good trade." These individuals were characterized by more focused career goals and long-term plans than most of the other enlistment types.

Money for Education. The fourth category of enlistment type also consisted of more focused individuals who were using the military to help them achieve their goals. These individuals reported enlisting for the specific benefit the military provides through educational incentives programs. While some had already started college and others intended to, these

interviewees were interested in obtaining a degree they could not get on their own due to financial strain. They viewed enlistment as an exchange of their time for the funding they needed to further their education. One grateful enlistee's claim that being in the military was "the only way" he would ever make it to college probably held true for many of these individuals. In this sense, the military was not a last resort; it was simply the best way for these individuals to achieve an otherwise financially unfeasible goal.

Floundering. In contrast to the preceding composites, this enlistment type was characterized by a complete lack of focus. For many "flounders," the visit to the recruiter and subsequent decision to enlist was completely unplanned and extremely abrupt. These individuals' goals were very unclear: one enlistee stated that he had "very little guidance and no outside sources of motivation to get him into school or on any other path." The few flounders who actually were employed did not appear to gain satisfaction or a sense of accomplishment from their work. In fact, all of these individuals appeared to have been waiting for something to happen in their lives yet had lacked the initiative or motivation to alter their present situations. For this reason, the recruiters were often able to exert a strong influence on such individuals, convincing them that the military was the easiest solution to the situation and the ideal first step on the path to a successful future.

Time Out. Individuals in this category were using the military as a means of delaying major decisions or as a way to occupy their time until they figured out what to do. Many of them either had tried college and felt they were wasting time and money, or had wanted to go to college but did not feel ready at the time. In general, they did not have specific goals and intended to find "discipline and a plan" in the military which would better prepare them for success in the future. Thus, much like a time out in a sports setting, military service was viewed as a period during which the individual (as opposed to the team) could organize and prepare for the future by developing a strategy for success.

Get Away/Escape. The seventh category consisted of those individuals who viewed enlistment in the military as the ideal way to escape from a frustrating situation and to get a new start in life. Whether it was stated directly or indirectly, these individuals were unhappy due to family problems, a suffocating environment, a poor job market, or a broken relationship. In fact, many of these interviews were quite depressing to read. For example, one interviewer reported that a particular young woman enlisted to "get away from her marginal existence, poverty, lack of employment opportunities, and a series of bad and abusive personal relationships." For such a person, the decision to enlist in the military could appear to be their chance for salvation. This *Get Away/Escape* enlistment type is distinguished from the *Time Out* type in the reasons expressed for wanting to get away: the former wanted to escape an aversive situation while the latter just needed a break from his / or her environment before making any serious decisions.

No Other Jobs/Prospects. The eighth and final category of enlistment type represented those persons who felt unsatisfied in their current employment situation and considered enlistment to be the only viable option. If employed, these youth often had held a series of dead-end positions. However, many were unemployed at the time of enlistment or could not find a job in

the field they desired. One person decided to enlist because his "life was going nowhere, [he] needed training in a skill, and [he] wanted financial security." The type of enlistees who based their decision on this factor had generally made a more planned or informed decision than those who enlisted to *Get Away/Escape* or to cease *Floundering* because most of them seemed to have considered their alternatives before coming to a conclusion.

Other Factors

It is important at this point to reemphasize that the interviewees were not easily classifiable as one "enlistment type." Most of them expressed a variety of reasons for making their enlistment decision and thus could not be described or categorized as simply as was done above. However, because the recruits did exemplify overlapping characteristics from several of the categories, it was necessary to delineate the defining characteristics for each of the eight groupings.

The new recruits in this study expressed every sort of combination of the eight categories in defining their reasons for enlistment. The most frequently mentioned of these combinations appeared to be *Self-Improvement* and *Job/Skill Training*. These two categories seem to go hand-in-hand because in gaining the skills or training they desired, the enlistees felt that they would be developing such qualities as self-discipline and responsibility while also increasing their future marketability in the job field. *Self-Improvement* actually appeared quite frequently overall and was found in combination with each of the other seven categories at some time. This is not surprising considering the advertising that is done for the Services. For example, the Army states, "Be all that you can be: get an edge on life in the Army." With such advertising, it is not unusual that so many new recruits mentioned a desire to become a better person in some way through their service in the military.

Historical Interest was another such category that appeared often in combination with other factors. Most frequently cited with more goal-oriented categories such as *Self-Improvement*, *Job/Skill Training*, or *Money for Education*, it appeared with the other three categories in only a few cases. This finding can be easily explained. If someone had developed an historical interest, the military was more likely to have been part of their future plan for some period of time. For example, someone who had always wanted to be a pilot would be prone to express a desire for *Job/Skill Training* along with his or her mention of an *Historical Interest*. On the other hand, *No Other Jobs/Prospects* and *Time Out* would not frequently be cited as reasons for enlisting by someone who had an historical interest in the military because enlistment would have been viewed as a viable option for the future from early on and would not have been done in order to take a break or delay other major life decisions.

There were some additional factors that seemed to play a role in the decision to enlist which did not fit directly into one of the eight categories. One frequently mentioned incentive included the benefits provided to members of the military. Those enlistees who either already had a spouse and children or intended to in the near future were particularly prone to mention such benefits as insurance policies and job security as factors in their decision. However, because this

did not appear to be a primary reason for enlistment (it was always mentioned in accompaniment with at least one of the eight categories and often appeared to be a "canned" response to the question of why the recruit enlisted), it was not included as a category of its own. Additional incentives noted were the opportunity to travel, meet new people, be challenged, and serve our Country.

A final important factor to mention is the effect that the recruiter had upon the enlistment decision process. Since experiences were as varied as the individuals themselves, a range of both negative and positive reactions to recruiters were reported.

On the negative side, many of the interviewees reported having had a feeling of distrust for the recruiter. Many felt that they had been told exactly what they wanted to hear and were disappointed to find that not all of it was true. This affected the decision process in several different ways. Sometimes it delayed the enlistment until later in the individuals' life, sometimes it made enlistees choose one branch of the military over another, and other times it appeared to make individuals adopt a cynical attitude toward the bureaucratic methods of the military. The recruiters were described by some of these enlistees as: "cold salesmen" and "liars," who were "phoney," "pushy," "harassing," and "hounding." One dissatisfied enlistee even claimed that "all recruiters lie--that's their job . . . they twist the facts to make you think this is where you need to be." While most of these critics had just one bad experience which caused them to select a different branch of the military, one enlistee was so frightened by the aggressiveness of the recruiter that he did not enlist for five more years and had completely regretted this decision ever since.

On the positive side, if enlistees' experiences with their recruiters were a particularly good ones, they generally served to speed up the decision process. Those interviewees who found the recruiters to be genuine, helpful, and unforceful were much more likely to have a positive feeling about the branch of the military that the recruiters represented. One enlistee said that he was so impressed by the recruiter and what he had to say that, "within two weeks, he was swearing in." In addition, several enlistees who had weekly contacts with their recruiters felt that they had become friends. Overall, these examples demonstrate that the experience with the recruiters, whether positive or negative, appeared to play a major role in the subsequent decision-making process of many of the interviewees.

Themes/Continuums

In addition to the enlistment types, some overall themes emerged in our analyses. These are included here in order to provide a more personal impression of the types of people who were enlisting. For example, there seemed to be a continuum of "dependent" versus "independent" personality characteristics which affected the subsequent decision to enlist. Those "dependent" persons were more likely to be influenced by the conviction of a significant other who favored enlistment or simply by a persuasive recruiter. They appeared to be concerned about what friends and family thought of their decisions and expressed such thoughts in the interviews. The more "independent" persons were more likely to go against the wishes of significant others and often

stated explicitly that these were a personal and private decisions. Such individuals appeared to take great pride in their ability to make such important choices on their own.

Another underlying continuum that surfaced was that of "goal-oriented" versus "exploring." Many enlistees were entering the Services with either a future career in sight or with an intention to finish school (with the help of the military) and get jobs later. These recruits appeared to be "goal-oriented" because they viewed the military as a means to an end. It was a path by which they could eventually reach their goals. Those who were categorized as *Job/Skill Training* or *Money for Education* enlistment types could be considered strongly "goal-oriented."

On the other hand, a large number of enlistees seemed to lack clear goals. Because they were satisfied with "exploring," they would be located on the opposite end of this continuum. Most of these individuals had very little direction in life, often because they had tried one or more routes which did not work out. Some were employed in dead-end jobs; some had not succeeded in college; and others were unemployed. These recruits really desired a change or a challenge in life and saw the military as the ideal way to either escape temporarily or to get away permanently from stagnant situations. Those classified as *Time Out* or *Floundering* enlistment types would be placed on the exploring end of this continuum due to their lack of goal-orientedness.

Such continuums are important to recognize, particularly for recruiting purposes. Those individuals who were at a time in their life when they were "dependent" and "exploring" in nature appeared to be more likely to be persuaded to enlist. Recruit comments indicated that recruiters who were in contact with such individuals would seem to have the highest probabilities of success. If recruiters initiated contact the opportune moment when the individuals were frustrated with life and looking for options, persuasive recruiters could make service in the military sound ideal and "sell" the enlistment almost immediately.

Figure 1 presents a visual conceptualization of the above continuums. It is important to note, however, that this diagram was constructed simply for illustrative purposes. No information is available regarding the orthogonal or oblique nature of these themes. For example, one's position on one continuum has no bearing on his / or her position on the other.

Continuums:

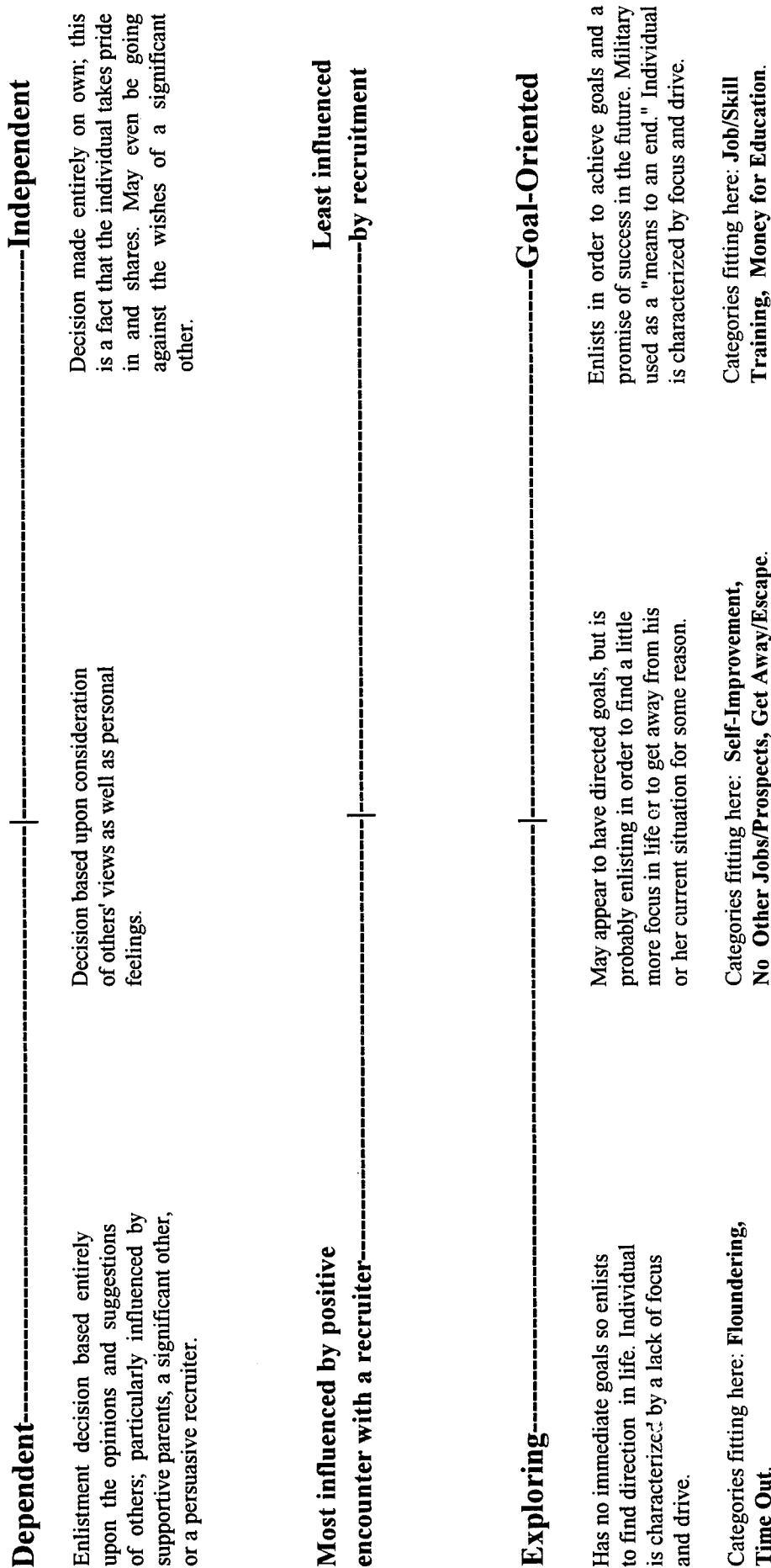


Figure 1: Visual conceptualization of the enlistment themes or continuums.

DISCUSSION

Working with interview data can be problematic for researchers seeking to tally the most popular or least popular reasons for enlisting in the military. One must turn to survey data to find such information. While interviews are most commonly used to gain an understanding of the thoughts of individuals, a careful analysis of interview data can also provide researchers with a rich source of information about groups. In the present paper, an attempt was made to strike a balance between the purely quantitative approach of treating enlistment decisions as numbers in a statistical model and the interview approach of allowing decisions to be so intimate and unique as to render them completely ungeneralizable.

Review of Findings

Of specific interest in this analysis of the data was whether types of enlistment reasons or motives would readily surface, and how similar (or different) they would be from those identified in previous survey research. Indeed, as demonstrated, it is not only possible but relatively typical to find commonalities among the enlistment types even with a heterogeneous sample of interviewed recruits. It also appears that these enlistment motivation categories are not unlike those found in previous survey research. The principal components factor analyses performed with both the Army's 1983 Survey of High School Seniors and with the 1982 and 1983 New Recruit Surveys produced strikingly similar enlistment factors (see Gade & Elig, 1986; Pliske et al., 1986; Baker, 1990). These Army surveys shared at least four common factors: self-improvement, education money, escaping civilian life problems (including unemployment), and patriotism, all of which are included within the present categories.

The eight composites or enlistment types identified by this review were: *Historical Interest*, *Self-Improvement*, *Job/Skill Training*, *Money for Education*, *Floundering*, *Time Out*, *Get Away/Escape*, and *No Other Jobs/Prospects*. *Self-improvement*, *Money for Education*, and *Get Away/Escape* seem to be tapping the same motives as the first three factors from the Army surveys. The patriotism factor is most likely covered, in part, by the *Historical Interest* category. The remaining reasons, *Time Out*, *Job/Skill Training*, *Floundering*, and *No Other Jobs/Prospects* appear to be extensions or elaborations of the original Army factors. For instance, the category that was labeled *Job/Skill Training* was reflected in an item that loaded onto the education factor in the Army surveys (i.e., "getting trained in a skill"). Likewise, the category that named *Time Out* was found in the item "getting time to figure out what I really want to do," which loaded onto the self-improvement factor in the Army surveys. Finally, although *Floundering* and *No Other Jobs/Prospects* were not exactly represented, they appear to be most closely related to the escaping civilian life problems factor.

Obviously, a visual comparison of these interview data categories with principal components analyses results from past surveys does not allow for any firm conclusions to be drawn. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note how similar the categories are to factors that have been previously identified, even though the reviewers of this study were unfamiliar with such existing factors. This may be an indication of the pervasiveness and the robust nature of the

identified enlistment categories and factors. Unlike the previous survey research, however, this analysis was capable of examining the overlap among the reasons at the individual level.

With few exceptions, the interviewed recruits seemed to communicate at least one of the eight categories as reasons for enlisting.² This is not to say that these enlistees were easily categorized. On the contrary, many of those interviewed expressed a complex combination of a few of the enlistment reasons, such that no two enlistees were exactly alike. Additionally, expression of the reasons underlying enlistment differed from one recruit to the next, complicating the categorization process further. While some reasons were clearly stated by recruits, others were inferred implicitly from their statements, and still others were inferred from the context of their discussion or from recurring statements. For example, recruits could be placed into the *Get Away/Escape* category without explicitly stating that reason, after having continually talked about the poor living conditions, a bad neighborhood, and the poverty that they would be leaving behind as they left for military service. Future research could address whether the way reasons are expressed (i.e., explicitly or implicitly) reflects the level of awareness or conviction. One point is clear, however: the fact that most recruits combined any number of the eight categories as their reasons for enlisting, while communicating them in a variety of ways reflects the psychological complexity of the enlistment decision process.

In many cases, the importance of the eight enlistment categories in the recruits' decision process seemed to be influenced by a few personality characteristics. This was reflected in the attempt to categorize the enlistees along themes or continuums of two personality types (i.e., independent or dependent, and goal-oriented or exploring). For instance, the degree to which the recruits were independent (versus dependent), and/or goal-oriented (versus exploring) seemed to shape their decision in some way. While dependent enlistees appeared more likely to have been influenced by others favoring enlistment (such as a recruiter), the more independent ones seemed to express more personal conviction in their decisions. Likewise, exploring individuals, lacking in clear future goals, appeared to view the military as a more temporary employment situation, while goal-oriented individuals were more likely to view the military as a way to achieve a particular career.

An interesting parallel could be drawn between the personality themes or continuums and the citizen soldier/career soldier distinction advanced by Moskos (1982b). In examining the motives and incentives for enlistment, Moskos hypothesizes that a short term of enlistment combined with lower active duty pay and high educational benefits upon leaving service, would attract many citizen soldier recruits. The citizen soldier, Moskos (1982a, 1983) argued, is not unlike the sort of person that served in the combat arms of the Armed Forces during the latest draft era. The remaining recruits, the career soldiers, are joining for an occupational advancement in the military. When drawing the parallel between the present interpretation and Moskos' conceptualization, it appears as if the dependent and exploring themes may have a lot in common

²One or two of the enlistees were very difficult to categorize because their reasons were completely unique. For example, one youth said that he was joining the military for the express purpose of helping his country win the Persian Gulf War.

with Moskos' citizen soldier concept, while the independent and goal-oriented themes may share some traits with the career soldier.

Additionally, it is important to note that these findings (i.e. the eight enlistment types) provide a good elaboration of the three broad categories advanced by HumRRO in the initial evaluation of these data. In their report (Lerro et al., 1992), HumRRO suggested that these recruits' decisions to enlist were based on reasons that were either a) economic (e.g., financial gain, or money for education), b) personal (e.g., self discipline or confidence), or c) environmental (e.g., family situations, or bleak future prospects).

Expanding upon HumRRO's economic category, this study included both *Job/Skill Training* and *Money for Education*, indicating that most recruits seeking economic advancement hoped to do so through education of some form. Under the personal category, a distinction was made between *Historical Interest*, *Self Improvement*, and *Time Out*. It seemed important to consider that personal reasons vary greatly from one individual to the next. While some recruits indicated that their interest in the military was based on a long-term desire to serve, others simply felt that a military job would make them better people. Still others enlisting for so-called personal reasons viewed the military as a way of delaying long-term, future decisions. Finally, HumRRO's third category, environmental reasons, was extended to include *Floundering*, *Get Away/Escape*, and *No Other Jobs/Prospects*. The common element in each of these types was an uncertainty or lack of confidence in the future. However, it was possible to create three separate composites here since the uncertainty involved in each was so different. Realizing the distinction among the three allowed for valuable clarification of the ways that an unstable environment might affect the enlistment decision process.

Conclusion and Summary

The findings presented in this report have implications for recruiting programs, advertising strategies, and recruiter sales presentations. Specifically, the eight aforementioned categories may be considered vital to the enlistment decision process. For example, new recruits' comments indicated that educational incentives play a strong part in the decision process. Thus, it seemed appropriate to highlight *Money for Education* as its own enlistment decision category. The U.S. Armed Forces have had a long tradition of educational incentive programs for enlistees. On the basis of the current findings as well as on the results of the Army surveys with high school seniors and new recruits (e.g., see Gade & Elig, 1986), it appears that this is one such incentive program that has proven its popularity. Mention of such incentives in advertising and recruiter sales presentations may increase the interest of potential enlistees.

Other potential uses for these findings include retention and support programs. It seems apparent that in order to best encourage and assist new recruits to complete their terms of enlistment, one must fully understand why they joined. This report has outlined eight common reasons for enlisting as cited by new recruits. In light of these reasons, perhaps some important retention research questions could be posed. For instance, do particular enlistment types stay for the same reasons they joined, or do certain types drop out disproportionately? Also, it may be

interesting to assess how actual military experience compared with expectations going in. The answers to such questions would benefit many programs including, for example, personnel support programs which could engage in early targeting of those individuals at greatest risk for attrition.

In conclusion, it is important to point out the limitations of these findings and to emphasize the need for additional research. First, this sample of enlistees was not a random or representative sample from the population of enlistees during February through June, 1991. The subjects were selected simply by virtue of having been present at the selected military entrance processing stations at the time. In this respect, this group was a convenience sample, and should not be considered representative of all possible new recruits.

Second, these interviews were conducted at a time when the U.S. was engaged in a state of war with Iraq. It is entirely possible that the Persian Gulf War could have affected the perceptions of the enlistees as well as the types of enlistees themselves. In addition to providing information on the general reasons for enlistment, these interviews may address reasons that motivate people to enlist in the military during times of national crisis. However, this avenue was not explored simply because the interviewers were instructed not to discuss the issue, and only a few of those interviewed actually spoke of the war.

Despite these limitations, important information was gleaned from the present interview study that can serve to supplement the existing research data on the enlistment decision. Most notable is the fact that it was possible to identify such specific enlistment reasons across a very diverse group of new recruits, and many of the reasons were quite similar to findings in previous survey research. It seems an unlikely coincidence that so many of these new recruits reported such similar decision thoughts. Also notable is the fact that a combination of reasons generally influenced the decision to enlist, and the kinds of reasons cited appeared to be related, to some extent, to the level of independence and goal-orientation of the individuals.

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APPENDIX A
NEW RECRUIT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

**PROTOCOL FOR
ENLISTMENT DECISION INTERVIEWS
(DEP'RS & SHIPPERS)**

ALL QUESTIONS ON THE RIGHT HAND SIDE (ODD-NUMBERED PAGES MUST BE DISCUSSED. THE LEFT (EVEN NUMBERED) PAGE EXPLAINS THE INTENT OF THE SET OF QUESTIONS, AND CONTAINS PROBES AND FOLLOW-ON QUESTIONS THAT SHOULD ASSIST IN GAINING A COMPLETE PICTURE.

1. Get a reasonably complete picture of the respondent interests as shown through leisure activities. Identify the nature of his/her leisure activities: physical or intellectual? Active or passive? Adult supervision/organization or not? Consistent w/adult norm? Solitary or with friends? A few select friends or lots of friends? Sweethearts?

Follow-up (e.g., If the respondent reads, what does he/she read? If movies, what kind?). Determine whether being with others is part of the activity. If only a few activities are mentioned, prompt for more. Use non-directional prompts first, following by suggested activities. If the respondent does not respond, don't harass; move on to other questions.

Talk about the kinds of things that the individual normally did on weekends (sports[what kind?]; watch tv [what shows; with whom?]; attending events [kinds and why?]) try to find out their opinion as to whether they did these things because they really wanted to, or because their town really did not have many things for teenagers.

What kinds of things did they enjoy doing most...particularly find out if they have hobbies...probe into why.

If many things mentioned, ask about favorites. Try to get a sense of distribution; i.e. where is most time spent? Try to get a sense of the intensity of interests.

Get a sense of relationships, the size of the circle of friends.

Identify and describe best friends; and probe for why.

Determine what they do together and degree of structure within the group.

Probe as to parents opinions of friends; what kinds of discussions occur with parents about friends.

Probe into what things (s)he & friends have done for each other; what they think friends should do for one another.

INTRO: Hello, I am xxx from xxx. I'd like to congratulate you on your decision to enlist in the xxx. My company has a contract with the Department of Defense to get a better understanding of the young men and women like yourself who enlist in the Services. What your interests are, and what you expect to get out of the military service. The comments you make to them today are completely confidential.

INTERESTS

1. Tell me a little about yourself, what your interests are, how you like to spend your spare time.

FRIENDSHIPS

2. Tell me about your friends.

What do you look for in a friend?

What kinds of things have you and your friends done for one another?

3. HOW THE RESPONDENT VIEWS HIS/HER HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCE.

Get respondent to talk about positive and negative images of school.

Probe into different aspects of school life:

- Student life [Paint pictures of students and teachers];
- Identify reasons for subjects best and least liked
- Discuss level of participation in extracurricular activities, and what they got from them.

Probe into perception of their academic performance.

Get at underlying perceptions of what, if any, benefits respondent derived from going to school; and discuss perception as to whether school helped in preparing them for the future.

Inquire as to whether he/she attended any school after high school (type of school; program of study; experience learned).

4. GAIN A SENSE OF SOCIAL OBLIGATION: whether the respondent feels he/she owes something to friends and/or community.

Determine and discuss opinions as to whether young people contribute some of their time volunteering to help others. Should they be required to do it?

SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

3. Tell me what you thought about high school.

How would you describe the kind of high school program you are/were taking [academic or college preparatory; commercial or business training; vocational or technical]?

Would you choose the same program again or would you pick another alternative? Why?

SOCIAL OBLIGATIONS

4. Can you tell me about things you or your friends have done to help other people?

(PAUSE...SEE IF THE Respondent CAN CITE EXAMPLES WITHOUT A PROMPT)
IF A PROMPT IS NEEDED, ASK: Lots of times, young people, either on your own or through school or church, have done things to help others. They may have helped an older neighbor by doing some yard work for free; they may have raised money for worthy causes by doing fun things like dance-a-thons and walk-a-thons. Some have helped out as volunteers in special Olympic events. Can you tell me about the kinds of things you and your friends may have done.

IF POSITIVE RESPONSE: Tell me about the event; why did you do it?

Give me your opinion about whether everyone should give some time for community work.

How would you react if someone asked if you would be willing to give up your summer and do some type of volunteer work for minimum wage?

How would you react if someone said that every 18 year old should spend one or two years either in a community project or the military?

5. IF POSSIBLE, TRY TO GET THE RESPONDENT TO IDENTIFY INDIVIDUAL(S) HE/SHE MOST ADMIRER.

Probe for specific traits the respondent admires.

Capture identities and determine whose opinions are most respected and why.

Determine whether the respondent has tried to imitate them. If more than one person is mentioned, ask about each one.

If the respondent says there are no such people, ask him/her to pick some celebrity or historical character. If this doesn't work easily, let it go.

6. OBTAIN INFORMATION ABOUT THE INDIVIDUAL'S SELF-IMAGE. THE ROLE MODELS DISCUSSIONS SETS THIS UP, BUT WE DON'T WANT TO FORCE COMPARISONS.

If you can't get the respondent started, try asking how his/her best friends would describe him/her.

Try to get respondent to identify what they see as their most positive points.

7. DETERMINE THE DEGREE OF TRUST AND RESPECT BETWEEN PARENT AND CHILD; DEGREE OF SUPPORT FOR YOUTH DECISIONS; GAIN A MEASURE OF MATURITY AND RESPECT FOR ADULT NORMS.

Probe into situations where the respondent and parent agreed (disagreed).

ROLE MODELS

5. Tell me about the people you admire.

Of all the people you know whose opinion do you respect the most? Why?

If you can be like anybody you want, who would you want to be?

SELF-IMAGE

6. Lets move away from talking about other people, and talk about you. How would you describe yourself?

If you could change anything about yourself, what would it be?

MUTUAL TRUST WITH ADULTS

7. Lots of times, moms and dads make decisions about what their children should or shouldn't do...and many times kids don't agree with those decisions. Thinking back from your junior high days until today, would you tell me how often you and your parents agreed or disagreed about things you wanted to do or decisions you made.

When you have not agreed, have your parents been supportive of the decisions you have made?

8. DETERMINE EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE AND HOW SATISFACTORY THAT EXPERIENCE WAS.

Discuss jobs in terms of what was done, what they thought about the work, level of satisfaction with job and whether job(s) was a valuable experience (why).

Probe into reason for working (e.g., if money, what was money for).

Find out if respondent worked while in the DEP. If so, determine why they worked (as opposed to just "having a good time" before shipping out).

Lead into the nature of aspirations: are they realistic, how much thought the respondent has given to his/her future, and how he/she went about determining what he/she would do.

Try to identify the nature of the respondent's ambition: money, prestige, etc. What do they perceive as the most important thing in their future (Look for social position as well as occupation).

IF NECESSARY: Did respondent receive any useful assistance from school counselors?

EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE

8. Tell me about your work experiences. What kinds of jobs you've had, and what they were like.

When did you first start thinking about what you would do when you got out of high school?

How did you go about deciding what to do?

Who help you in making career decisions?

I know this is thinking ahead, but what do you hope to be doing five to then years from now? What would you like your life be like?

Name some of the things you think are really important in life.

9. AND 10 ARE THE MOST CRITICAL POINTS OF THE INTERVIEW. WE WANT TO RECONSTRUCT THE ENLISTMENT DECISION, FROM THE RESPONDENTS FIRST THOUGHTS THROUGH ENLISTMENT. WE WANT TO WALK THE SUBJECT THROUGH THE WHOLE SEQUENCE OF WHAT WAS GOING ON IN HIS/HER LIFE (E.G., GET OUT OF SCHOOL, QUIT JOB, PARENTAL DIVORCE, ETC.) WHAT CONTACTS THEY HAD W/RECRUITING SERVICES.

Start with when thought of enlisting first enter their mind (wanted to enlist since childhood...started thinking in senior year...saw TV ads...correspondence in the mail...recruiter in school.

Probe into their perceptions of all the things that had happened that led them to thinking about enlisting (was deciding to enlist self-initiated, recommended; prompted by recruiter contact, etc.).

Probe into their location and situation (were they still in school, wanted to get out of the house [or some other personal situation], living with parents, looking for a job, working at a job they didn't like; what kinds of options were they considering; what kind of academic or economic situation were they in).

Probe into what they were seeking: a positive experience, or an alternative to something negative (e.g., nothing else to do; couldn't find a job, etc.).

Identify all influencers; who most influenced decisions; gain a perception of pride in service; perception of degree of respect.

Obtain a total list of who he/she talked to.

Of these people, ask them to identify who were in (or had served in) the military.

Obtain impressions of the various attitudes of each person toward the military in general, and the specific Service in which he/she enlisted.

Determine who is considered most important influencer.

Determine level of support, or degree of angst.

IMPORTANT: BY THEIR NATURE, THE RESPONDENT'S DISCUSSION FOR 9 & 10 MAY JUMP ABOUT. IN RESPONDING TO ONE QUESTIONS< HE MAY ALSO PROVIDE INFO FOR A QUESTION YOU MAY NOT YET HAVE ASKED> DON'T "GET HIM BACK ON COURSE." GO WITH THE FLOW AND ADJUST YOUR NOTES LATER!

THE DECISION

9. Let's talk about what led up to your decision to enlist. I want you to "think-aloud" about what was going on in your life during the time from when you first started thinking about enlisting. I would like you to tell me everything you were thinking about - no matter how silly or unimportant it may seem.

First, when did you first start to think about enlisting?

Where were you?

What you were doing?

When you were thinking about enlisting, with whom did you discuss serving in the military?

Had any of the people with whom you discussed enlisting actually served themselves?

IF YES: How long ago?

How did they describe their experiences?

How do the people who matter to you most feel about your enlisting?

AT EACH STAGE OF ENLISTMENT CONSIDERATION, WE WANT TO KNOW THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE RESPONDENTS: WHERE WAS HE/SHE LIVING WHAT WORK/SCHOOL ACTIVITIES HE/SHE WAS INVOLVED IN, THE LEVEL OF SATISFACTION/DISSATISFACTION WITH HIS/HER SITUATION, ETC.

Did the individual go through some systematic review, or was the decision primarily based on emotion. Attempt to develop sets of variables considered and arrange them in sequential order of consideration.

We want to know the respondent's disposition at each stage: What did he/she think, was he/she convinced they were doing the right think, etc.

How did they go about obtaining information (Friends, family, school teachers/counselors/coaches, other Service recruiters). How did they measure positive and negative "things" considered.

Obtain the respondent's thoughts regarding the possibility of serving in combat, and what went through their mind when the war broke out in the Persian Gulf.

10. You went through a number of steps when you were qualifying for enlistment. Let's walk step-by-step through each of them. As I bring up a question about each step, try to remember anything and everything that happened: What you did, what you were thinking, who you talked to, what happened to you.

What prompted the decision to contact a recruiter?

How and when did you make contact with the recruiter?

When did you agree to take the ASVAB?

When did you agree to go to the MEPS?

What kinds of documents did you need to get for the recruiter (birth certificate, diploma, letter of projected graduation, police reports, etc.)?

What was your initial impression of the MEPS and the recruiting point of contact in MEPS?

What did you think about when taking the physical?

What was going through your mind when discussing options with the counselor?

What helped you decide on your enlistment option?

At what point in time did you decide you would definitely enlist; and what was the final deciding factor?

How did you feel when swearing in to the DEP?

What happened when you meet with your recruiter while you were in the DEP?

FOR SHIPPERS ONLY: What are you thinking about now as you prepare to ship?

Looking back on the entire process, of all the things you considered, and all the people you talked to, try to tell me which of those were the most important reasons for your decision to enlist.

What would you have done if you did not enlist?

IMAGE

11. Think back to your junior high school days, what was your image of the military? Can you remember where you got that image? (AS NECESSARY: Would it be from books, games, movies? ...What do you remember about it/them)?

Did you think the military was something you'd like to be part of?

How did the image change as you went through high school? What kinds of things caused you to change that image?

At what point in time did you start forming opinions about each of the military services?

What is your impression today of the Army/Navy/Air Force/Marines. [USE EACH SERVICE; SAVE THE ONE THE RESPONDENT IS JOINING FOR LAST.]

12. How would you describe the typical person who enlists in the (Army/Navy/Air Force/Marines [USE EACH SERVICE; SAVE THE ONE THE RESPONDENT IS JOINING FOR LAST.] Is this something you considered when deciding which Service to join?

13. LOOK FOR PHYSICAL AND SOCIETAL CONDITIONS:

Ask them to describe "growing up" in their neighborhood.

How much of their life was spent in the neighborhood?

Ask for descriptors of the neighborhood and neighbors: Urban, suburban, rural, friendly and safe, did the neighbors do things together; apartments or single homes; blue collar; professional; lots of folks on welfare; most kids went to (college, work, military, unemployed).

FAMILY BACKGROUND

13. Tell me about the neighborhood you grew up in.
14. Are both your parents still at home? If not, which parent did you live with a majority of the time.
15. What is the highest level of education of your mom and dad/brothers and sisters?
16. What are the occupations of your mom and dad?
17. What are the occupations of your brothers and sisters?
18. Are you currently married?
19. How do you feel about leaving home?
20. What do you think basic training will be like?
- 21A. FOR ACTIVE DUTY TYPES ONLY: Describe to me what you think your typical day in the Service might be like once you are out of basic training.
- 21B. FOR RESERVE COMPONENT TYPES ONLY: What do you think weekend drills and annual training periods will be like?
22. Thinking about everything you know about the military, what do you expect to get out of military service?

23. Now that you are here, waiting to ship out, what/how are you feeling?

IS THERE ANYTHING WE HAVEN'T TALKED ABOUT THAT YOU WANT TO
BRING UP?

Thank you. Congratulations on your decision to enlist, and best wishes for future success.